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SUBJECT: ELECTION SEASON IN FULL SWING WITH PARLIAMENTARY
LISTS AND PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES CHOSEN

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, A.I., Mary Curtin for Reasons 1.5(B)
and (D)

Summary

1. (C) With just over two months until parliamentary elections and just under three months until the first round of presidential elections, the election season in Poland is in full swing. The presidential race is still fluid. Parliamentary speaker Wlodzimierz Cimoszewicz, who entered the race several weeks ago, has surged into first place in most polls, with conventional wisdom now being that he will face center-right Law and Justice (PiS) leader Lech Kaczynski in the final round. Opinion polls on the parliamentary elections have been less volatile, but presumed future coalition partners, centrist Civic Platform (PO) and PiS have switched places, with PiS now generally seen as in the lead, which would affect the make-up of a coalition government and impact the presidential race. In the meantime, the currently governing Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) continues its public infighting, with the old guard being shoved off Sejm electoral lists and into the less powerful Senate. Parties farther out on the political spectrum, including populist Self-Defense (SO) and Catholic nationalist League of Polish Families (LPR) will likely run ahead of their polling numbers, but not participate in any government. Several other parties may not meet the five percent threshold to be seated in parliament. End Summary.

Cimoszewicz the New
Presidential Front-runner

2. (SBU) The entry of Wlodzimierz Cimoszewicz into the very fluid presidential race as the principal candidate of the left has once again created a new front-runner. Cimoszewicz shot to first place in recent opinion polls, ahead of center-right PiS candidate, Lech Kaczynski, and non-partisan candidate Zbigniew Religa, who led some surveys just a month ago. Two surveys published July 19 show Cimoszewicz winning 30 and 31 percent of the vote in the first round of elections, with Kaczynski scoring 20 and 25 percent, and Religa dropping behind populist Andrzej Lepper. However, the two new surveys differ on which of the two would win the second round, with one poll showing Cimoszewicz winning 58 percent of the vote if matched with Kaczynski, and another showing them in a dead heat. Populist Andrzej Lepper, PO's Donald Tusk, and Religa are variously shown as having 10 to 15 percent support. The rest of the candidates (there are now some nine candidates announced, although not all have officially filed) fall below ten percent.

3. (C) Cimoszewicz, who originally announced he would not run for president, told Ambassador he was joining the race in order to stop Kaczynski, who enjoyed a lead in late spring and early summer. Support for Kaczynski has kept him steadily in first or second place in most polls for several months, but his rise in popularity also sparked a counter-reaction of support for candidates seen as able to stop him. Before Cimoszewicz announced his candidacy, Religa, a heart surgeon with no clear platform, peaked with 25 percent support in one opinion poll, dropping to 14 percent in today's survey. It is hard to predict whether or not support for Cimoszewicz will hold. He has enjoyed a bounce despite (or perhaps because of) the fact that he stormed out of an July 9 Sejm investigatory commission hearing, criticizing the commission's members and purpose. There are a significant number of Poles with left and center-left political identification who are looking for a candidate to support, even if they have lost faith in the SLD. This could provide Cimoszewicz -- as a credible "anti-Kaczynski" -- with sustained support.

PiS Moves Ahead in
Parliamentary Race

4. (SBU) The parliamentary race has been less volatile, with the greatest shift in recent months being center-right PiS's

gradual trend toward first place, and centrist PO's concomitant slide into second place, changing presumptions about the balance of power and division of spoils in a future coalition government. Most polls have for some time shown that PiS and PO will be the top two vote (and seat) getters, and together should win enough votes to form a coalition government. Until recent months, however, poll results showed that PO would win more votes and seats, and common wisdom was that PO leader Jan Rokita would become Prime Minister, with something of a presumption that Lech Kaczynski would win the presidency, providing a neat balance for the

two parties. In recent months, PiS has steadily moved ahead of PO in most polls. While both PiS and PO leaders consistently say that they expect to form a coalition, they have been more sharply battling each other for the top position, with PO leaders, in particular, attacking PiS's more statist economic platform and plans for constitutional and governmental reforms.

15. (SBU) A PiS lead could pose some problems for both parties. It would be hard for Rokita, who has been playing the role of presumptive Prime Minister for some time, to accept a lesser position if PO ends up in second place. On policy matters, he has stated publicly and privately that PO will insist upon its liberal economic agenda, including a flat tax, as a condition of coalition, but he will have a hard time doing that if PiS holds the winning hand and ends up with the Prime Minister's office and other leading domestic ministries. A PiS win could also be problematic for PiS itself, and for Lech Kaczynski's presidential bid in particular. His twin brother, Jaroslaw Kaczynski, is the party's parliamentary leader, and would be the only obvious PiS choice for Prime Minister, but there is considerable discomfort with the thought of the identical twins running the country. Even the Kaczynski's have ruled out such a scenario. Some have suggested that Rokita would be prime minister no matter which party holds more seats. Nonetheless, many commentators think that if PiS has a strong showing in the parliamentary race, voters will balance that out with a vote for another candidate, such as Cimoszewicz, when they return to the polls two weeks later for the first round of the presidential election.

SLD Infighting Continues

16. (SBU) In the meantime, the SLD continues to struggle with internal battles and support in the polls hovering around 10 percent despite Cimoszewicz's popularity bounce. The SLD National Council came out of a seven-hour meeting over the weekend with the announcement that several of the party's hard-line old guard, including former Prime Minister Leszek Miller, former Sejm Marshal and party chief Jozef Oleksy, as well as Marek Dyduch and Jerzy Jaskiernia would not be on SLD's parliamentary election lists, and instead would have to run for the less powerful Senate. (Miller has already said he would not run.) There is considerable speculation over who holds the real power in the SLD, with most people assuming it is not the 31-year old leader, Wojciech Olejniczak, who was elected to head the party in May. Other party stalwarts, including Defense Minister Jerzy Szmajdzinski, Interior Minister Richard Kalisz, SLD Parliamentary club leader Krzysztof Janik, and Sejm Deputy Katarzyna Piekarska, are all parliamentary list leaders in their constituencies. Several commentators, including a public TV program July 19 report, say that the old guard are complaining that President Kwasniewski, who has undertaken several efforts to rejuvenate and reform the SLD's image, is behind Olejniczak's push to exile Oleksy, Miller and the others. Olejniczak, of course, asserts that he is the real leader. The SLD can count on a minimum level of support from die-hard members who benefited from the socialist system, but it seems there is little it can do to significantly improve its electoral chances in this election, and SLD leaders seemed resigned to simply holding on so they can position themselves for the future.

Other Parties Position
Themselves for Parliamentary
Roles, but Some Will Lose Out

17. (C) Farther out along the political spectrum, both Andrzej Lepper's Self Defense (SO) and the Catholic nationalist LPR seem likely each to win a block of voters in the 10-15 percent range, but are not expected to join any government. LPR, according to most observers, has a solid group of supporters, and some splintering in the party and differences with the influential Catholic "Radio Maryja" do not seem to have hurt it much. LPR may end up with a somewhat better showing on election day than polls indicate because LPR voters turn out in higher percentages than the

overall population. (However, LPR's presidential candidate, Maciej Giertych, father of its parliamentary leader, Roman Giertych, ranks consistently very low in the polls.) And, despite some earlier speculations that PiS might look to the Catholic nationalist League of Polish Families (LPR) for support if PO and PiS do not hold a solid parliamentary majority, it is now clear from public and private statements that the fundamental differences between the parties are quite sharp, even though they appeal to some of the same voters. In a meeting with Ambassador, PiS parliamentary leader Jaroslaw Kaczynski harshly criticized the world view

of LPR leader Roman Giertych, especially his ultra-nationalist views. Roman Giertych has said, however, that LPR might cast a vote of confidence in favor of a presumed PO-PiS coalition.

18. (SBU) Lepper and his party could also perform better than expected. Some political observers predict that disgruntled former SLD supporters will cast their vote for SO and Lepper, attracted by Lepper's populist rhetoric. Several observers have told us that they think that there are a significant number of people who will vote for SO candidates or for Lepper in the privacy of the ballot box, but do not want to admit this to a pollster, meaning he and his party could do better than polls are predicting. But all polls show that Lepper would be soundly defeated in any match up should he somehow make it to the second round of the presidential election.

19. (SBU) Several other parties across the spectrum are hovering so close to the five percent mark that they may not, in the end, win enough votes to be seated in the Sejm. The evolution of the post-Solidarity Freedom Union (UW) party into the new Democratic Party (PD), and the splash caused by its recruitment of several high profile SLD members, including former economy minister Jerzy Hausner, has not helped it at all in the opinion polls, and PD may not win any seats. Other parties in a similar position include Social Democracy Poland (SDPL -- which broke away from SLD in 2004 over corruption), the Peasants Party (PSL -- Poland's oldest political party and a former partner of SLD in the current government), the Union of Labor (UP -- another SLD partner), and the Greens (which currently hold no parliamentary seats).

Comment

110. (SBU) While filing deadlines are not until next month (August 16 for presidential candidates and August 25 for parliamentary candidates), the outlines of the election are now clear, and the campaigns fully under way. This is the first time parliamentary and presidential elections have been held in such close proximity, and so it is hard to speculate on the impact of each election on the other. In addition, opinion polls about support for various parties are done on a nationwide basis, whereas the proportional division of the parliamentary seats will be done at the level of the electoral district, meaning there could be some significant differences between the relative position of parties in the polls and the number of Sejm seats they end up winning. End Comment.
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